P1120386

W.P.(40)172.

27TH MAY. 1940. COPY N0. 45

WAR CABINET.

HOME DEFENCE (SECURITY) EXECUTIVE.

Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council.

At their meeting on 27th May (W.M.(40)141st Conclusions) the War Cabinet authorised me to consider what emergency measures should be taken to deal with the dangers of the "Fifth Column" and to take immediate steps to put those measures into operation. I have accordingly 'taken action on the following lines:

1. A small central coordinating body will be set up to be known at "The Home Dcfence (Security) Executive."

2. This body will be under the chairmanship of Lord Swinton and will be composed of members to be nominated by the Home Office, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, M.I.5 and S.I.S.

3. It will be open to the chairman to co-opt additional outside members should this be found desirable.

4. The Home Defence (Security) Executive will be linked to the Home Defence Excutive by a common staff.

5. The duties of the Home Defence (Security) Executive will be to consider questions relating to defence against the "Fifth Column", and initiate action. Action will not be taken direct, but through the appropriate Departments.

6. Questions requiring to be submitted for higher authority would, as regards civil matters, be referred to the Home Secretary, and as regards military matters, to the Secretary of State for War, by whom they would be referred, if necessary, direct to the War Cabinet.

(Intd.) N. C.

P1120388

EXTRACT FROM W.P.(40) 271 DATED 19TH JULY 1940

1. The memorandum which I circulated to the Cabinet on 27th May (W.P.(40)172) gave particulars of the opganisation of the Home Defence (Security) Executive, which was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Swinton to co-ordinate action against the Fifth Column.

2. In addition to presiding over the Home Defence (Security) Executive, Lord Swinton has been entrused with executive control of M.I.5. and is thus responsible for counter espionage activities in Great Britain.

3. The Prime Minister has now decided that Lord Swinton shall also exercise operational control over the work of M.I.6. in respect of all the activities of M.I.6 in Great Britain and in Eire. M.I.6. will also continue to place at the disposal of Lord Swinton all iinformation in their possession which may have a bearing on Fifth Column activities in Great Britain or Eire.

P1120389
SIR EDWARD BRIDGES.

you asked me to let you have a note on the functions of Lord Swinton as Chairman of the Security Executive.

On the 27th May 1940 the War Cabinet authorised the Lord President ot the Council (then Mr. Chamberlain) to consider what emergency measures should be taken to deal with the dangers of the "fifth column", and to take immediate steps to put those measures into operation.

Mr. Chamberlain thereupon set up the "Home Defence (Security) Executive" consisting of members nominated by the Home Office, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, M.I.5 and S.I.S. under the Chairmanship of Lord Swinton. Lord Swinton was authorised to co-opt outside members should this be found desirable.

When reporting the setting up of this Executive to the War Cabinet on 27th May (W.P. (40) 172) Mr. Chamberlain described it as a "small central co-ordinating body" and defined its functions as being to consider questions relating to defence against the "Fifth Column" and initiate action. He made it clear that action would not be taken direct but through the appropriate Departments.

In a Memorandum dated 19th July (W.P.(40) 271) Mr. Chanberlain informed the War Cabinet that, in addition To presiding over the Home Defence (Security) Executive Lord Swinton had been entrusted with executive control of M.I.5 and was thus responsible for counter-espionage activities in Great Britain. He also reported that the Prime Minister had decided that Lord Swinton should also exercise operational control over the work of M.I.6 in respect of all the activities of M.I.6 in Great Britain and in Eire.

In the Memorandum of 27th May, it was stated that the Home Defence(Security) Executive would be linked to the Home Defence Executive by a common staff. It soon became necessary, however, for Lord Swinton to set up a small central staff to assist the Home Defence (Security) Executive in certain phases of its work. Thereafter the link between the Home Defence (Security) Executive and the Home Defence Executive became less close and the former eventually dropped the words "Home Defence" from its title and became known as the Security Executive.

In practice the Executive has extended its activities far beyond the scope of its original terms of reference. This arose partly from the vesting in Lord Swinton of operational control of M.I.5 and the activities in Great Britain and in Eire of M.I.6 and partly from the need for a focus for the consideration of a large number of security questions where the interests of a number of Departments were affected. In short, the Security Executive acts as a focal point at which security and censorship services can be brought together to discuss their problems with each other and with representatives of a great number of Government Departments.

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The Security Executive itself has thus remained in the main a co-ordinating body served by a small full-time Secretariat. It does perform certain executive functions connected with the controlling of enemy and subversive activities among British, Allied and Neutral seamen in Allied and Neutral Countries. The expenditure incurred in the course of this work is, however, certified by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

To sum up, it may be said that Lord Swinton's function is mainly one of co-ordination but.that he also has executive responsibilities by virtue both of certain special activities of the central staff of the Security Executive and of the measure of control which he exercises over M.I.5 and M.I.6.

In W.P.(40) 271 it was stated that Lord Swinton should regard the Lord President of the Council as the member of the War Cabinet whom he should consult and whom any Departmental difficulties, should they arise, should be referred. This conflicts to a certain extent with paragraph 6 of W.P.(40) 172 which stated that "questions requiring to.be submitted for higher authority would, as rejards civil matters, be referred to the Home Secretary, and as regards military matters to the Secretary of State for War by whom they would be referred if necessary, direct o the War Cabinet."This discrepancy has, sofar as I am aware, never been cleared up. in practice, Lord Swinton reports to the Lord President on any question w.ich is not primarily or solely the concern of any one Minister.

The appointment of a Minister to succeed Lord Swinton might possibly raise some difficulties in regard to responsibility to Parliament. This would not arise in connection with his co-ordinating activities as Chairman of the Security Executive in the "Committee" sense of the term. It might, however, arise in connection with his executive functions. If a Minister had these executive responsibilities in regard to M.I.5 and M.I 6 and permanent-staff of the Security Executive, the House of Commons might be tempted to question the tradition whereby the activities of these and similar bodies are not discussed in the House. In this connection, it would be worth your while to look at the flagged passage in the Official Record for 15th August 40 (Column 957-964). Apart from this, I Can see difficulties if a "hierarchical" makes arising as aturens…… this Ministers and his colleagues.
This appointment of a Minister as Chairman of Security Executive might also show unduly this "execution" element and thus lance embarassement for departmental presentations.

3rd June, 1942.

P1120391

EXTRACT FROM HANSARD, THURSDAY 15TH AUGUST, 1940. (Columns 957 – 964) SWINTON COMMITTEE.

45. MR. MANDER asked the Prime Minister whether in view of The fact that persons drawn from the ranks of tile Conservative and Labour parties are members of the Swinton Committee, he will consider the advisability of appointing a Liberal?

47. MR. STOKES asked the Prime Minister whether he will give the names of all Members of this House who have been appointed to, or invited to, work with the Swinton Committee?

MR. ATTLEE: I will answer these Questions together. Perhaps my hon. Friends would be good enough to await the statement which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister proposes to make at the end of Questions.

MR. MANDER: Is it proposed to deal with this particular Question which I have asked?

LATER -

THE PRIME MINISTER (MR. CHURCHILL): I propose, with the permission of the House, to take advantage of the Questions of the hon. Members for East Wolverhampton Nr. Mander) and Ipswich (Mr. Stokes) about the work and composition of the Swinton committee, to make a few general observations on the subject. I submitted to the House some time ago the view that it was not in the public interest that Questions should be asked and answered about this Committee or other branches of Secret Service work, or about measures to deal with Fifth Column activities. It would be very wrong for a Government to plead the public interest as a reason for avoiding public and Parliamentary criticism and debate, and personally, I would never do so. I am always anxious to give the House of Commons the utmost possible information, and to welcome debate. Therefore when I said. it was not in the public interest that this matter should be pursued. I hoped that this would have been accepted by all Members of the House. However, I regret to say that a nuaber of Questions have been put on the Paper day after day, quite disregarding the request which the Government made. It would have been possible for the Government, under the powers now accorded, to prevent these Questions from appearing on the Paper, and to prevent all reference to the subject in the newspapers; but I thought it would be much better to leave the putting down of Questions to the good will and sense of responsibility of Members, and I am very sorry that in a few cases this attitude has not been forthcoming.

Now why is it that we have thought it right to plead the public interest against the discussion of the Swinton Committee and its work? Not assuredly because we have anything to conceal which would reflect upon the loyalty, impartiality, and good faith of the Government, or anything which would do the Government harm as a Government, if it were all explained in the utmost detail. The reason is simply one of principle, namely, that matters of this kind, and Committees of this kind, are not fitted for public discussion, least of all in time of war. The House has recognised this principle for many years, and has always refused to allow any discussion of Secret Service funds, or to receive any return of how the money is expended, and similarly I am sure the House would wish the rule to be respected in the case of a Committee, Which, as I said, deals with Fifth Column activities, and other cognate matters. No other country, when it is at war, gives information of this kind, and once the principle was admitted that a stream of Questions could be put about them, and that the Government would be bound.to answer these Questions factually, there would be very serious injury done to our safety.

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The House has, almost unanimously, recorded its confidence in the Government.That does not mean that the House is confident we shall do everything right, or that errors of policy and administration should not be freely criticised, and scandals or negligence exposed; but it does mean, I think, that when sach a Government pleads the public interest, it should be believed that it is acting fairly and honourably, and telling the truth, and not concerning, itself with shielding any Ministerial or personal, or party interest. I hope very much we may be believed by the House, and that confidence will not be withdrawn from us, even in a small matter like this, at a time when we are making head, and making head successfully, against dangers as great as any that have ever threatened our national freedom and survival.

I am sorry indeed to have to say so much about this Committee, because it makes people think there is something mysterious in the whole affair. Nothing could be more straightforward. About 10 weeks ago, after the dark, vile conspiracy which in a few days laid the trustful Dutch people at the mercy of Nazi aggression, a wave of alarm passed over this country, and especially in responsible
circles, lest the same kind of inder.i-iinin- tactics and treacherous agents of the enemy were at work in our Island.
[An Hon. Member: "Watch them."] Several branches of the State Departments are, of course, always charged with the duty of frustrating such designs. But they were not working smoothly. There were overlaps and underlaps, and I felt that in that hour of anxiety that this side of the business of National Defence wanted pulling together. I therefore asked Lord Swinton to undertake this task.
[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because he was the best man to do it.
[An HON. MEMBER: "He failed in another job."] One has to be very careful how one judges failure, especially when one's own record of success our not to one's credit. I am glad to tell the House that a very Creat improvemient has been effected in dealing with this Fifth Column danger. I always thought it was exaggerated in this Island, and I am satisfied now that it has been reduced to its proper proportions, and is being gripped and looked after with very high efficiency. It is important that this should be so, because although we feel, and are, very much stronger than we did in May, the danger of invasion has by no means passed away, and we are repeatedly assured from German circles in foreign countries that the performance is about to begin. I should not have felt I was doing my duty by the National Defence, if I had not taken these special steps to cope with Fifth Colunn activities, and I can assure the House that the powers that Parliament has given to the Executive will not be used consciously in any unfairy oppressive, or, if I may use the expression, un-British spirit. I trust therefore that the House will support me in declining, in the public interest, to answer any further uestions upon the subject.

MR. MANDER: While I agree with what the Prime Minister said and appreciate it, does he realise that the reason this Question was put down was this? As the names of the Committee gradually became known, there was a widespread lack of confidence in the personnel, and when I found that members of the Conservative and Labour parties were represented, I naturally asked why the Liberal party could not be represented.

MR. AUSTIN HOPKINSON: There were two points made by the Prime Minister on which I should like further information, if I may have it. First, there was the statement that the Government have power to prevent Questions being put on the Order Paper. Surely not?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I am glad that Questions in the form which give away to the enemy matters which are essentially secret, and are against the public interest, are not accepted by the Clerks at the Table, and I think the views of Ministers viould be considered in that respect.

MR. H0PKINSON: Then I understand it is only Questions which in their form are adjudged to be against the public interest?

THE PRIME MINISTER indicated assent.

MR. HOPKINSON: This; is an important point because you, Mr. Speaker, will recollect refusing sundry Questions which I myself put down. Refusal was on the ground that the Prime Minister said he would not answer a Question on that subject. It is within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that I contested that Ruling and stood out against it. I was under the impression that it was an important part of our privileges that we should be able to put down Questions on the Paper which conveyed no information in any way detrimental to the public interest, though the Minister concerned would then be perfectly at liberty to refuse to answer. What I maintain is, that the Chair cannot refuse to put these Questions on the Paper, and I think I have established that right on this occasion.

Another point was this: I think we are all a-reed that the Prime Minister is fit to judge whether this particular Committee should be set up.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member will remember that the statement made by the Prime Minister was in answer to a Question. There cannot be any Debate.

MR. HOPKINSON: I an trying to elucidate further information, with your permission, Mr. Speaker. We cannot understand why so much mystery was made about it. That is really what has given rise to all the trouble. When great mystery was made about it and names were refused, trade union opinion became very suspicious, whether justifiably or not is not the point. When the name Lord Swinton was announced that suspicion was increased, owing to his activities on behalf of big business in politics.

MR. SPEAKER:The hon. Member is making a speech.

MR. HOPKINSON: With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I am endeavouring to elucidate fron the Prime Minister the reason why __

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. Member would ask a definite question, the Prime Minister would no doubt answer it. Otherwise I cannot allow debate.

MR. HOPKINSON: Why did the Prime Minister make such a mystery about it and refuse to give information which was perfectly harmless?

THE PRIME MINISTFR: If my hon. Friend had paid half the attention to the full and very respectful statement which I have made to the House that he was accustomed to giving to obstructing my efforts to get this country properly defended before the war, I would not have had to answer this Question at all.

MR. HOPKINSON: I ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker, against this gross and lying innuendo2

THE PRIME MINISTER: The main purport of my answer was that I would answer no further questions, at any time, on this particular subject. Whether it is convenient or easy for me to answer them or not,I would not think of answering any of them. I have said that it is not in the public interest that private matters of this kind should be ferreted out and discussed in public. I should. have thought that, having appealed to the House in this way, the Government might receive that consideration which they are entitled to claim.

MR. A. BEVAN: On a point of Order. As notice was given a little while ago that this matter was to be raised or the Motion for the Adjournment, would it not assist-

MR. SPEAKER: That is not the Motion for the Adjournment.

MR. BEVAN:Yes, Sir, but would it not be desirable that the atmosphere should be cleared up at this moment so as to avoid, if possible, any further discussion? Is it not the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has inadvertently missed the whole point of the criticism? No Questions have been put on the Order paper, the answers to which would have injured the public interest. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh! "] The Prime Minister cannot point to any uestion of that kind. But there is widespread dissatisfaction in the country about the composition of this committee.

MR. ST0KES: I put a Question down about the payment of the members of this committee. The Lord Privy Seal said that Lord Swinton and Mr.Wall were paid nothing, but that he was not prepared to tell us what Sir Joseph Ball and Mr. Crocker were paid. Now that we know that Lord Swinton and Mr. Wall are not paid anything, surely we are entitled to know what Sir Joseph Ball and Mr. Crocker are paid.

TIE PRIME MINISTER: That is covered by the very careful and lengthy answer which I have given. At any rate, that is the position which the Government take up.

MR. THURTLE: May I put this one point? Has it escaped the notice of the Prime Minister that many of the Members who are pressing: this Question are rather luke-warm about the prosecution of the war?

MR. BEVAN: On a point of order. Should not the hon. Member who has made that statement make some distinction and indicate to whom he refers and is it not time that certain hon. Members should cease to act as pimps of the Government?

MR. THURTLE: May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether it is in Order for all hon. Member to apply a foul and offensive term to another Member?

MR.. BEVAN: When the hon. Member indicates the persons to whom he refers and defends his indication, I will withdraw my remark.

SIR WILLIAM1 DAVIDSON: Is it desirable that, at this critical time, democracy should be made a laughing-stock by such a frivolous attack upon the Prime Minister, whom the whole country desires to carry forward this nation to victory?

MR.SPEAKER: I think it is time that this unedifying incident ceased.

P1120396

EXTRACT FROM HANSARD, 8TH AUGUST, 1940.
(Columns 414 – 416)
H0ME DEFENCE (SECURITY) EXECUTIVE.

45. MR. STOKES asked the Prime Minister Whether, in view of the fact that he has added a prominent trade unionist to the Swinton Committee, he Is prepared to state the name of that official together with the Salary paid to him?

47, 48 Lind 49. MR. AUSTIN HOPKINSON asked the Prime Minister
(1) what is the name of the trade union leader who has been appointed to the Swinton Committee;
(2) upon what Vote the expenditure of the Swinton Committee is borne;
(3) what remuneration is being received by each of the members of the Swinton Committee?

MR. ATTLEE: The Home Defence (Security) Executive, over which Lord Swinton presides, is responsible for the co-ordination of a number of activities in connection with Home Defence, and the Services und other Government I)epartments are represented on it, and the executive has been furnished with the necessary staff, Lord Swinton was invited to undertake this Work by the present War Cabinet and is responsible to the Prime Minister. The remuneration of the staff and the expenses of administration are borne on the Treasury Vote. Lord Swinton himself, and Mr. Wall - who is the trade union leader referred to - draw no salary. Other officers connected with, the executive draw their pay as officers of the Fighting Services or as civil servants. Salaries are paid by the Treasury or by the various Services or Departments to which attRched officers belong. As has been stated on previous occasions, it is the view of His Majesty's Government that it would not be in the public interest to discuss the work of the Security Executive; and I have no intention of doing so. The Prime Minister takes full responsibility for its functions and work.

MR. STOKES: Is the Lord Privy Seal prepared to state what Sir Joseph Bull and Mr. Crocker receive in the way of salaries?

MR. ATTLEE: No, Sir.

MR. STOCKES: Why should we not know?

MR. BUCHANAN: How is it contrary to the public interest to know the salaries? Why should we not know; we know the men and why should we not know the salaries?

MR. GRANVILLE: Does the Committee report to the Home Secretary or to the Prime Minister?

MR. ATTLEE: It reports to the Prime Minister.

MR. STOKES: Why does not the Prime Minister pay their salaries himself?

MR. HOPKINSON: What conceivable public interest could suffer from the House of Commons knowing how our money is being spent? Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that the appointment of Lord Swinton and the other gentleman mentioned are appointments which will give confidence in this secret committee to ihe trade union movement?

HON. MEMBERS: Answer!

MR. ATTLEE: I said that Mr. Wall was a well-known and a highly respected trade unionist having the confidence of those in the trade union movement.

MR. HOPKINSON: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that Lord Swinton is a suitable person for this office?

MR. STOKES: In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I beg to give notice that I shull raise the matter on the Adjournment at the earliest possible moment.

P1120398

EXTRACT FROM W.P. (40) 271 DATED 19TH JULY, 1940

1. The memorandum which I circulated to the Cabinet on 27th May (W.P. (40) 172) gave particulars of the organisation of the Home Defence (Security) Executive, which was set up under the, chairmanship of Lord Swinton to co-ordinate action against the Fifth Column. U

2. In addition to presiding over the Home Defence (Security) Executive, Lord Swinton has been entrused uith executive control of' M.I.5. and is thus re~ponsible for counter espionage activities in Great Britain.

3. The Prime Minister has now decided that Lord Swinton shall also exercise operational control over the Work of in M.I.6. in respect of all the activities of M.I.6. in Great Britain and in Eire. M.I.6. will also continue to Place at the disposal of Lord Swinton all information in their possession which may have a bearing of Fifth Column activities in Great Britain of Eire.

P1120399

From the
Chancellor of the
Duchy of Lancaster

Privy Council Office,
Treasury Chambers,
Whitehall, S.W.l.

10th June, 1942.

PRIVATE AND PERSONAL.
PRIME MINISTER.

I had a long tall, with Lord Swinton last night and I am quite prepared to take on the work of a secret nature which he has been performing.

Although he is not leaving London for two or three weeks he suggests that it would be a good thing if I were to begin working next week and he would then be able to initiate me himself and we wou1d work together until the time comes for him to go. If therefore you approve I propose to begin working with him on Monday next.

(intld.) D.C.

Sir Adward Bridnes:

How should this change be announced to Parliament?
I will also mention it to Cabinet to-morrow.

W.S.C.
11.6.42.

P1120400

SECRET
W.P.(42) 258. COPY NO. 56

16TH JUNE, 1942.

WAR CABINET

THE SECURITY EXECUTIVE

Note by the Secretary of the War Cabinet

(Previous Papers W.P.(40) 172 and 271)

1. The Prime Minister has approved an arrangement whereby the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has succeeded Lord Swinton as Chairman of the Security Executive. Mr. Duff Cooper has also assumed the executive responsibility with regard to M.I.5 and the activities in Great Britain and Eire of M.I. 6 which was previously exercised by Lord Swinton.

2. The Lord President of the Council will continue to be the War Cabinet Minister who will be consulted by the Chairman of the Security Executive when necessary, and to whom any inter-departmental difficulties will be referred.

(Signed) E. E. BRIDGES.

Great George Street, S.W.1.

P1120401

Office of the War Cabinet
Great George Street
S.W.1

MR. MARTIN

I am not quite sure whether this means that Mr. Ernest Brow will take over from Mr Duff. Cooper the duties which the latter performs (a) as Chairman of the Security Executive and (b) as Minister in charge of M.I.5.

EEB

12th November, 1943

P1120402

A P P E N D IX A

STAFF OF THE SECURITY EXECUTIVE

Name	Rank	Parent Department
Mr. R.S. Wells	Assistant Secretary	Home Office,
Mr. W.J.Y. Diplock	Temporary Principal	-
Miss B. Abraham	Temporary Administrative Assistant	-
Miss S. Ayliff	AssistantSpecialist (Temporary)	-
Mr. W.R. Fox	Higher Clerical Officer	Inland Revenue
Miss B.M. Crosoer	Clerical Officer	" "
Miss G.M. Honey	Clerical Officer	Clearing Of-'ices
Miss M.F. Millen	Clerical Assistant	Ministry of Labour and National Service
Miss M.P.K. Gislingham	Temporary Clerk Grade II	-
Miss E.M. Smith	Shorthand Typist	Inland Revenue
Miss P.S. Rex	" "	Supreme Courts of Judicature
Miss J.L. Axten	Temporary Shorthand Typist	Treasury
Miss S. Farrell	Temporary Typist	"

There is also an office-keeping and messenger staff of 5.

Acting

P1120404

Extract from "THE EVENING STANDARD"
dated 21st Miay, 1945.

SECRET COMITTEE GOING

I understand that the Security Executive in the early days of the war it was known as the Swinton Committee is likely to be abolished soon.

It was set up at the beginning of the war to deal with "Fifth Column activities and other kindred matters" in Mr. Churchill's words. It became one of the most powerful behind-the-scenes bodies in this country.

Close secrecy has been maintained about its work. Lord Swinton, its first chairman, was succeeded by Mr. Duff Cooper; then Sir Herbert Creedy took over.

Sir Herbert, who is 67, was Sir James Grigg's predecessor as Permanent Under-secretary for War. He was at the War Office nearly 40 years, and retired in 1939.

THREE MEMBERS

The Security Executive has never numbered more than three. Sir Herbert's two colleagues now are Mr. Isaac Foot (who will be Liberal candidate for Tavistock at the General Election) and Mr. A.M. Wall (until last year secretary of the London Society of Compositors,.

The committee has been specially concerned with coordination of various activities connected with home defence and the Services.

The official view, I gather, is that the need for such an authority is disappearing. The date of its dissolution will be decided by the War Cabinet.